



Friday, March 5, 2004
Downriver transit facility poses risk
By Rep. John Conyers Jr.

Webster's dictionary reminds us that the true definition of "luck" encompasses a series of events or circumstances that operate for or against an individual. Some luck is good, and some of it is of a lesser fortune. The truth is, in many instances (and depending on your perspective), it may be both.

For example, the recent decision by Trenton Mayor Gerald R. Brown and the Wayne County Commissioners to purchase approximately 60 acres of riverfront property along the Detroit River can only be heralded as good news for all of southeast Michigan.

The purchase of this land will allow planners to reclaim the riverfront from industrial uses and redirect development efforts toward residential and commercial uses. Among other things, these new projects will provide greenways, parks and access points for citizens to enjoy the Detroit River.

The developments will also provide local government with an unexpected benefit; the ability to exercise greater control over a growing concern in the region, namely the Riverview Trenton Railroad Co.

The Riverview Trenton Railroad Co.'s ongoing efforts to establish and operate an intermodal transportation facility along the banks of the Detroit River undoubtedly will make the entire southeast region of Michigan far less safe. Many experts who have taken the time to examine the risks associated with intermodal transportation terminals have often highlighted the many vulnerabilities linked to such ventures.

A recent National Cargo Security Council report warned of the potential dangers associated with such terminals by pointing out that individuals often are able to "exploit the complexity of intermodal systems" because they provide almost "infinite ways" to conceal contraband. Contraband that, in the future, could come in the form of suspected terrorists, who not too long ago attempted to enter this country by crossing the Canadian border.

Local residents, along with a bipartisan group of their elected representatives, led by U.S. Rep. John Dingell, D-Dearborn, and myself, attempted to bring these concerns to the attention of the U.S. Surface Transportation Board prior to its approving the railroad company's proposed plan of operations.

They also tried to inform the board of the significant negative environmental impacts that are expected to result from the railroad company's planned operations, particularly upon the Detroit River and ongoing redevelopment efforts. Regrettably, the Surface Transportation Board decided to pursue a course of action that could potentially increase the level of vulnerability and threat to the entire region.

Fortunately, in the coming months, the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals will have an opportunity to decide whether the board complied with appropriate federal law and whether its actions were consistent with the public interest of the residents of Michigan.

Hopefully, the court will seize this opportunity and issue an opinion that clearly places a premium on the national security interests of all Michiganians. Such a decision undoubtedly would be good luck for local residents and environmentalists, yet bad luck for the backers of the Riverview Trenton Railroad Co.

In either event, lady luck will have continued to shine Downriver.

U.S. Rep. John Conyers, Jr., D-Detroit, represents Michigan's 14th Congressional District, which includes parts of Downriver. Send letters to The News at 615 W. Lafayette, Detroit, MI 48226, (313) 222-6417 or letters@detnews.com.